

<p><i>Absolute Brightness</i> by James Lecesne Harper Teen, imprint of HarperCollins, 2008, 472 pp., \$21.89</p> <p>Nothing is what it seems, learns 15-year-old Phoebe the year her almost-14-year-old cousin Leonard Pelkey comes to live with her family. Arriving in pink and green capri pants and homemade platform shoes, Leonard rates “instant reject” status in Phoebe’s book. After he disappears, though, Phoebe begins to see him, her family, her best friend, her community, and human nature in a different light.</p> <p><i>Absolute Brightness</i> is Phoebe’s first-person investigation of Leonard’s disappearance. Even as Phoebe looks beneath appearances into the dark heart of evil, that voice remains authentically adolescent.</p> <p>A light-hearted study of serious issues, <i>Absolute Brightness</i> will have readers of many ages and interests turning pages, chuckling, wondering, thinking.</p> <p>Judy Beemer Milford, KS</p>	<p><i>The Adoration of Jenna Fox</i> by Mary E. Pearson Henry Holt, 2008, 272 pp., \$16.95</p> <p>Jenna Fox, conceived through invitro-fertilization, is the only child of a bioengineer and his house-restorer wife. Having been in a permanent coma for a year after a horrendous auto accident, Jenna at 17 finds herself living in California with limited memory of what happened. Her parents keep her hidden and refuse to answer questions about her past in Boston. Her grandmother Lily seems to resent her, while Jenna begins to search for herself only to discover a scenario that is surreal and frightening.</p> <p>Although the novel is set in the future, the mystery’s explanation seems wildly plausible. Jenna’s father has bypassed federal permission to create his daughter as she once was, physically and mentally, using a substance he created called Bio Gel and other aspects of bioengineering. Retaining only 10 percent of her original brain’s memory, Jenna struggles to discover who she really is as she gradually weans herself from her overprotective parents to live as human an existence as she can.</p> <p>Judith A. Hayn Little Rock, AR</p>
<p><i>A Beginning, a Muddle, and an End: The Right Way to Write Writing</i> by Avi Harcourt, 2008, 164 pp., \$14.95</p> <p>Avi continues the adventures of Avon the snail and Edward the ant in order to explore the process of writing and becoming a writer. Part fable, part <i>Alice in Wonderland</i>, a <i>Beginning, a Muddle, and an End</i> attempts to express wisdom about writing through the confusion that results from the characters’ misunderstandings of concepts of writing. For example, when Avon declares, “I’ve always thought that it would be best to keep my writing on the light side,” Edward replies, “Writing in the dark is harder.”</p> <p>The entire book is a series (a muddle, perhaps) of similar explorations and insights, covering spelling, punctuation, and so on. And while the book exploits the genre conventions of children’s literature, writers of all ages will appreciate the understanding Avon and Edward uncover through their discussions. In fact, the individual chapters could serve as springboards to serious discussions of the writing process by adolescent and adult writing classes and writing groups.</p> <p>F. Todd Goodson Manhattan, KS</p>	<p><i>Bird Lake Moon</i> by Kevin Henkes Greenwillow/HarperCollins, 2008, 192 pp., \$15.99</p> <p>Mitch Sinclair’s world is falling apart: his parents are selling their home and divorcing. While arrangements are being made, Mitch and his mother move to Bird Lake to live with his grandparents. His grandparents welcome them with open arms, but as time passes, tension develops between his grandparents and his mother. Mitch discovers a neighboring house, vacant, near the lake. He escapes the stress by cleaning up around the house and fantasizing that he and his mother live there.</p> <p>When Spencer, his younger sister and parents show up at the house, Mitch sets out to scare them away with pranks. His plan goes awry, however, once he and Spencer meet—they become close. Mitch reveals his pain about his family breaking apart, and Spencer shares his family’s deepest pain: the death of a child years ago at Bird Lake.</p> <p>This is a quiet story about loss and the healing power of friendship. Rich characterizations and sparse language compel the story forward. The ending hints to a possible sequel.</p> <p>Pam B. Cole Kennesaw, GA</p>

<p><i>Blood Roses</i> by Francesca Lia Block HarperCollins, 2008, 144 pp., \$15.99</p> <p>Magical Realism/Transformation ISBN: 978-0-06-076384-8</p> <p>Francesca Lia Block, winner of the Margaret A. Edwards Award for lifetime contributions to young adult literature, serves up yet another collection of thought-provoking magical realism stories. A genre-defying writer, Block delivers nine stories told from the female perspective; some are connected, and most include or describe a transformation: a girl becomes a giant (giantess); a boy, a centaur, and a mother, a vampire. Themes include dangerous first encounters, first kisses, teen sex, sexual abuse, friendship, death, identity and maturation.</p> <p>As thought-provoking as her earlier works, this collection is characterized by Block's signature style: her sentence structure is sparse; yet her writing is poetic and metaphorical. Literary motifs abound: blood roses, dollhouses, and tattoos speak to pain, fear, and loss. The brief vignettes are excellent models for creative writing. The stories are short, but complex. For mature readers, grades 10 and up.</p> <p>Pam B. Cole Kennesaw, GA</p>	<p><i>Book of a Thousand Days</i> by Shannon Hale Bloomsbury, 2007, 306 pp., \$17.95</p> <p>Female Friendship/Healing ISBN: 978-1-59990-051-3</p> <p>Princess Saren is in love with Khan Tegus but betrothed to the dark Lord Khasar. Saren fears him, for good reason, and rejects the match. As punishment for her rebelliousness, her father locks her in a windowless tower for seven years. As the novel opens, Princess Saren is alone, except for the companionship of her mucker maid, Dashit.</p> <p>In this recasting of Grimm's classic fairy tale, Newbery Award winning author Shannon Hale once again delights modern audiences with a feisty, female protagonist, who not only must come into her own but also protect the fearful, insecure Princess from herself as well as from others who would do her harm.</p> <p>Young adult girls, who are also on their own journeys of self-discovery, will be enchanted by this tale about female friendships, healing, and coming of age amidst the real-world tensions of betrayal, abandonment, deception, and loss. Discussion of literary elements, such as the narrative structure of fairy tales or the traditional use of character types, will make this book a productive companion to a study of classic tales in the ELA classroom.</p> <p>Phyllis Thompson Johnson City, TN</p>
<p><i>Cherry Heaven</i> by L. J. Adlington Greenwillow Books, 2008, 458 pp., \$17.89</p> <p>Science Fiction ISBN: 978-0-06-143181-4</p> <p><i>Cherry Heaven</i> by L.J. Adlington takes the reader to another world where one's life has been determined by the color of the individual's hand stamp. Tanika and Kat, sisters from war-torn City Five, travel in the highest luxury available as they arrive to the New Frontier with high expectations: some are met and some are not.</p> <p>As Tanika and Kat learn to live in the New Frontier, another girl, Bottle Seal 55, is also on a journey, a journey in search of revenge and truth. When the girls' paths cross, decisions will have to be made. Do the sisters have enough strength and courage to stand up for what is right? Is there really a ghost out in the orchard? Are people still considered people even if some in society consider them scum?</p> <p>Adlington delivers the readers a variety of moral themes that must be considered as the multi-layered plot unfolds. Although <i>Cherry Heaven</i> appears daunting at nearly 500 pages, readers of all levels who enjoy science fiction and fantasy will enjoy this novel as well.</p> <p>Rebekah Skillen Manhattan, KS</p>	<p><i>The Dragonfly Keeper</i> by Tanya Plumel Fava Press, 2008, 254 pp., \$12.95</p> <p>Fantasy ISBN: 0-9801396-0-0</p> <p>After Fritz their dog gets out of the house and runs away from them, Manuela and Silvia begin their adventure. Their neighbor, Miss Sasha, an odd, weathered woman, offers the girls cider and suggests they "help save the magic in this sad world." The girls agree, and after Miss Sasha dresses them in costumes, she hands them a smooth shaanti, or place stone. Miss Sasha explains there are three rules for using the stone, and the girls go in search of "the Weaver."</p> <p>Their quest to protect the Dragonflies is riddled with missed steps and separations. The girls and Fritz do their best to save the Dragonflies from the "Rogs."</p> <p>Plumel uses imagination and her main characters to weave a story where working together and trusting magic and others brings the girls home safely. An appendix of language translations helps the reader understand unfamiliar words.</p> <p>Deborah Barnes Junction City, KS</p>

<p><i>Dragon's Keep</i> by Janet Lee Carey Magic Carpet Books, 2008, 320 pp., \$7.95</p> <p>Rosalind is a beautiful princess with a bright destiny. It has been prophesied that she would bring peace and restore the honor of her people. But Rosalind also bears a curse, a dragon's claw.</p> <p>Rosalind's mother forces her daughter to wear gloves to cover her devil's mark, even killing to hide Rosalind's curse. But fate overtakes the young princess when she is kidnapped by Lord Faul. Rosalind learns the truth behind her curse and struggles to learn who she truly is.</p> <p>Carey spins a story of magic, destiny, treachery and love that is exciting and emotional. Readers will identify with Rosalind's attempt to discover who she is and where she belongs. The book is appropriate for middle and high schoolers.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Karolinde Young Manhattan, KS</p>	<p><i>The Entertainer and the Dybbuk</i> by Sid Fleischman Greenwillow Books, 2008, 180 pp. \$17.89</p> <p>Touring post World War II Europe by train, <i>The Great Freddie</i> encounters a mysterious traveling companion. Together, the two of them regale audiences with tales of humor and atrocity. Freddie becomes bound to the spirit of this young Jewish boy, Avrom Amos. The only way the <i>entertainer</i> can return to his own "normal" life is to accompany this <i>dybbuk</i> on a cross-continental journey of revenge.</p> <p>Newberry Medalist Sid Fleischman captivates young readers from the first moment Freddie steps off the vaudevillian stage. Colorful characters and humorous on-stage dialogue juxtapose the serious business being conducted behind the scenes. So engaging is the tale of Freddie and Avrom's journey of revenge that readers may be unaware of how subtly they have been drawn onto a larger stage, one that portrays the atrocities to which Jewish children fell victim during the Holocaust.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Patricia Ackerman Abilene, KS</p>
<p><i>Facts of Live</i> by Gary Soto Harcourt, 2008, 176 pp., \$16.00</p> <p>Gary Soto's collection of short fiction offers a variety of adolescent characters lives at the intersection of Spanish and English languages and Mexican and American cultures. The portraits of the lives of these young people are gentle explorations of the profound implications of their ordinary lives. We see a talented young artist, for example, and through her eyes we discover the contrast between the natural beauty surrounding her life and the relative poverty of her family's small trailer on a <i>ranchito</i>. We follow the adventures of a young man who, frustrated after striking out to end a softball game, unwittingly assists a suspicious character (likely a burglar). Through his adventures we see the richness of his life, family, and community.</p> <p><i>Facts of Life</i> is a nice collection of stories that should help adolescent readers appreciate and respect how we are all citizens of the world.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">F. Todd Goodson Manhattan, KS</p>	<p><i>Genius Squad</i> by Catherine Jinks Harcourt, 2008, 436 pp., \$17.00</p> <p>Much of the fun in reading <i>Evil Genius</i>, the first book of this series by Catherine Jinks, was the twist of following Cadel Piggott through the Axis Institute for World Domination. It was a fresh perspective on evil characters. Her sequel, <i>Genius Squad</i>, loses the tongue-in-cheek style but carves out its own exciting story as Cadel continues his quests to discover the identity of his father, to consider whether he's actually all that evil, and to find a place where he can finally have 24/7 access to the Internet.</p> <p><i>Genius Squad</i> picks up shortly after the events in <i>Evil Genius</i>, with Cadel living in a foster home under constant police protection. Cadel is approached by the Genius Squad, a group formed to investigate GenoME, one of the late Dr. Darkkon's projects.</p> <p>The series continues to be a great read for sharp-minded students interested in computers and hacking, along with a bit of James Bond-style action and plots for world domination thrown into the mix. Readers who rarely see their interests portrayed in YA literature will finally find them here.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">John Ritchie Manhattan, KS</p>

<p><i>Come</i> by Michael Grant Harper Teen, 2008, 576 pp., \$17.99</p> <p>Apocalyptic/Science Fiction ISBN: 978-0-06-144876-8</p> <p>When everyone over the age of fourteen suddenly vanishes, San Perdido Beach, California is never the same. Not only are all of the adults gone, but there are no working telephones, no Internet access, no cable, and only children left behind to deal with the aftermath. Fires begin from appliances left on when the adults vanished. There are no firemen to put out the fires. Cars smash into buildings and each other, after being relieved of their drivers, but there are no emergency workers or doctors to help care for the children who are injured. What caused this all to happen?</p> <p>Kids must care for younger children as well as themselves. And those kids all look to Sam Temple, nicknamed "School Bus Sam" for his heroics in saving the kids in a near-disaster on a school bus a couple of years before. Will Sam be able to bring order where there is chaos and confusion? Will the adults return? And what is the FAYZ? A definite page-turner that will keep readers hooked from the very first paragraph on.</p> <p>Jennifer Lee Louisville, KY</p>	<p><i>The Great Race: The Amazing Round-the-World Auto Race of 1908</i> by Gary Blackwood Abram Books for Young Readers, 2008, 142 pp., \$19.95 ISBN: 978-0-8109-9489-8</p> <p>Automobile History/Racing</p> <p>The year is 1908, and three companies from three different countries have assembled teams to compete in a round-the-world race. The gimmick? The racers will be driving the new-fangled horseless carriage.</p> <p>Blackwood details the adventures and misadventures of the German, Italian, and American teams as they race from New York to Paris. The racers cross some of the most hostile and unforgiving climates in the world, including Siberia, in an attempt to prove the greatness of their new machines and bolster the burgeoning nationalism that is spreading across the globe.</p> <p>Blackwood does an excellent job of detailing the many difficulties faced by the men running the race. Perhaps the greatest strength of the book, beyond the exciting pictures, is the final chapter describing the aftermath of the race. Blackwood connects the race to the rise of the automobile culture as well as the World Wars. This book is appropriate for upper elementary and above.</p> <p>Karolinde Young Manhattan, KS</p>
<p><i>The Higher Power of Lucky</i> by Susan Patron Atheneum, 2007, 134 pp., \$16.95 ISBN: 978-1-4169-0194-5</p> <p>Abandoned Children/Friendship</p> <p>At ten years old, Lucky has hit rock bottom: her biological mother is dead, her father is "absent," and her most loyal companion in the world, HMS Beagle, leaves her in a dust storm in the desert. Lucky's life is spinning out of control.</p> <p>It is not until she heads into the Mojave desert that she charts her own course and gains the perspective to take control of her life. However, holed up in a cave during a dust storm, she finds herself caring for a scared five-year old named Miles, who is also lost and motherless, instead of forging ahead with her own quest for stability and control.</p> <p>Hard Pan (pop. 34) is every town, and Lucky is every kid, whose issue is abandonment, whose life is complicated, and who knows one doesn't have to be an adult to hit rock bottom. <i>The Higher Power of Lucky</i> is a story about vision and about the perseverance it takes to wait for the storm to pass and the dust to settle.</p> <p>Phyllis Thompson Johnson City, TN</p>	<p><i>Honeybee</i> by Naomi Shihab Nye Greenwillow Books, 2008, 164 pp. \$17.89 ISBN: 978-0-06-085390-7</p> <p>Poetry/Self Discovery</p> <p>Through her practice of being present in each moment, Shihab Nye embarks on a journey of self discovery. This insightful collection of eighty-two poems and prose paragraphs examines cultural diversity and family dynamics set against the purposeful motion of bees. Dynamic patterns of literary insight illuminate the connectedness of all humanity through the eyes of a constantly moving observer. Lighting briefly at precise moments in time, the author departs with newly found insights and a satiated feeling of personal connectedness.</p> <p>Astute imagery draws the reader into Nye's vision of a "shared world" where humans connect with one another, regardless of apparent differences. She demonstrates that in order to experience this phenomenon, individuals must learn to be present through all of their senses, opening themselves to the wonders of human existence. This work embodies Emerson's own literary advice to "adopt the pace of nature. Her secret is patience."</p> <p>Patricia E. Ackerman Abilene, KS</p>

<p><i>The Hunger Games</i> by Suzanne Collins Scholastic Press, 2008, 407 pp., \$17.99</p> <p>Take the ancient Greek myth of Crete demanding Athens send 14 of its children as sacrificial tributes, substitute the minotaur for gladiator combat pitting the youths against one another, set it in a dystopic future, make it all entertainment for the reality television of a tyrannical government, and then give it characters that add his/her own twist to the story—these are the ingredients for <i>The Hunger Games</i>, the first book in a thrilling new trilogy from Suzanne Collins.</p> <p>Collins doesn't waste a single character in the entire novel. From our narrator-heroine Katniss Everdeen, to her Hunger Games sponsor Haymitch Abernathy, to Hunger Games show host Caesar Flickerman, each character is rich in depth and worthy of his/her own story.</p> <p>Collins also keeps the action moving at a smooth and quick pace. The novel is violent without ever being bloody. Collins avoids easy, Hollywood-style endings and gives us realistic, complex characters. Librarians and teachers will have a hard time keeping this book on their shelves.</p> <p>John Ritchie Wamego, KS</p>	<p><i>In Defiance of Hitler: The Secret Mission of Varian Fry</i> by Carla Killough McClafferty Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2008, 208 pp., \$19.95 ISBN: 978-0-374-38204-9</p> <p><i>In Defiance of Hitler</i> offers an accessible and interesting presentation of the efforts of Varian Fry to help people escape the Holocaust. The narrative begins with Fry's observation of a racist mob in Berlin in July 1935 and continues through his life as a writer following the war.</p> <p>This book is a valuable addition to sources about the Holocaust for young people. The book includes numerous black and white photographs from the period, and the narrative offers an insight to the conditions in occupied France and the methods Fry and his associates used to assist in the escape of Jews and Anti-Nazi French citizens. The text is accessible to adolescents, offering a detailed and accurate representation of historical events in a narrative style replete with compelling details. The book should be included in the libraries of all secondary schools, and the book provides a vivid example of an individual taking great personal risks on behalf of the needs of others.</p> <p>F. Todd Goodson Manhattan, KS</p>
<p><i>In the Small</i> by Michael Hague Little Brown for Young People, 124 pp., \$19.99</p> <p>The illustrator Michael Hague creates his debut graphic novel based on the Gaia theory that posits that living organisms will adapt the nature of their environment in order to make the environment more suitable for life. A mysterious blue flash hits New York City and reduces the human inhabitants to one-twelfth their size. Mouse Willow foresees the catastrophe and leads city dwellers in a ragtag citizens' army to escape the chaos through the tunnels.</p> <p>Meanwhile, his sister Beatrice at the family home creates her own ecosystem within the walled perimeter. As Mouse approaches, she leaves safety to comb the dangerous streets to seek others caught in the upheaval. Mouse and his survivors find pharmacy and toy store supplies in an abandoned mall as they acquire necessities to carry on toward sanctuary. Unknown to each other, both teens head for the same source for miniataure tools, inventions, and other equipment to make living "in the small" feasible. Filled with supernatural horror, blood-curdling tension, and brilliant artwork, the novel embodies hopefulness with a hint of more disaster to come.</p> <p>Judith A. Hayn Little Rock, AR</p>	<p><i>Into the Dark: An Echo Falls Mystery</i> by Peter Abrahams Laura Geringer Books (imprint of HarperCollins) 2008, 300 pp., \$20.89 ISBN: 978-0-06-073709-2</p> <p>With her love of Holmesian deduction and wordplay, thirteen-year-old Ingrid sleuths into a dark past, searching out secrets to save Grampy from an unjust murder accusation. Braver than Buffy and twice as believable, Ingrid convincingly walks the neverland between adolescence and adulthood in this third book in the Echo Falls Mysteries series.</p> <p>Edgar Award nominee Abrahams artfully blends humor, history, intelligence, and suspense to create just-right prose that keeps the pages turning without ever seeming artificial. Pre-teen and early teen readers, male and female, will identify with Ingrid's family problems and disregard for school, yet admire her gutsy cleverness.</p> <p>Judy Beemer Milford, KS</p>

<p><i>Last Chance for First</i> by Tom Hazuka Brown Barn Books, 2008, 296 pp., \$8.95</p> <p>Relationships/Identity/Sports ISBN: 978-0-9798824-0-1</p> <p>In a mad mix of high school relationship conflicts, peer pressure, following in his older brother's footsteps, and striving to be the star of his soccer team, junior Robbie Fielder takes on his junior year at Northbrook High. Fielder finds himself torn between living up to jock expectations of his harassing coach and the opportunity for a college scholarship, and going against popularity by falling more and more for the new girl who seems to be an outcast.</p> <p>Hazuka captures the essence of a teenager's action packed high school life where making choices and learning how to be yourself go hand in hand. Everything from drunk driving to nagging parents are smartly intertwined into a well written story from the point of view of an everyday, likable high school student.</p> <p>Melissa DeWitt Manhattan, KS</p>	<p><i>Little Audrey</i> by Ruth White Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008, 160 pp., \$16.00</p> <p>Coal Mining/History/Appalachia ISBN: 978-0-374-34580-8</p> <p>No young adult writer paints a better portrait of life in the Appalachian Mountains than Ruth White, author of the Newbery Honor book, <i>Belle Prater's Boy</i>. White's latest effort represents her most autobiographical work to date. Narrating her story through the voice of Audrey, her older sister, Ruth travels back to the summer of 1948, a time in which she, her two sisters, and her parents were living in Jewell Valley, a coal mining camp in southwestern Virginia, and a time that changed her life forever.</p> <p>The reader learns Audrey has just recovered from scarlet fever. Rail thin, she is teased by boys and girls in the camp, but has a close friend in Virgil, a young boy who recently moved to the camp from Kentucky. Audrey's father, a miner, drinks heavily and spends much of his paycheck on alcohol. Her mother is haunted by the loss of an infant child and struggles to feed the family—many days they go without.</p> <p>An extraordinary addition to the literature on life in the Appalachian coal mining communities of the mid-1900s and a must read in social studies.</p> <p>Pam B. Cole Kennesaw, GA</p>
<p><i>Love in the Corner Pocket</i> by Marlene Perez Point, Imprint of Scholastic, 2008, 230 pp., \$17.89</p> <p>Coming of Age/Friendship ISBN: 978-0-545-01991-0</p> <p>Chloe McBride is completely confident when it comes to shooting pool. Gino's restaurant, with its well-used pool tables, is like a second home. With a cue stick in her hand, all of the complications of her Laguna Beach life take a back seat: her parents' separation, her less than perfect figure, and her gorgeous best friend. But when Gino's handsome nephew Alex appears on the scene, Chloe finds her concentration broken. When Alex shows an interest in getting to know her, her gorgeous best friend shows an interest in Alex and Chloe's life becomes even more complicated.</p> <p>As the story unfolds, Chloe must face the possibility of reconciliation between her parents, the unraveling of a friendship, and the realization that change is an inevitable part of life. Upper middle school and high school will relate to the questions of loyalty and friendship that emerge in this novel.</p> <p>Vicki Sherbert Wakefield, KS</p>	<p><i>Me, the Missing, and the Dead</i> by Jenny Valentine Harper Teen, 2007, 201 pp., \$17.89</p> <p>Family Relationships ISBN: 978-0-06-085069-2</p> <p>The first novel by British author Jenny Valentine is a carefully crafted portrait of a 15-year-old protagonist's search to learn about the father, who abandoned his family several years earlier. This quest begins with Lucas Swain's unlikely discovery of an urn containing the ashes of an elderly woman sitting on a shelf in the offices of a cab company. Immediately drawn to this woman, Lucas learns that she was abandoned in the back seat of a cab. With the help of his grandmother, Lucas takes possession of the ashes, and this mysterious woman in the urn seems intent on telling Lucas something. What he learns will change everything.</p> <p><i>Me, the Missing, and the Dead</i> is a compelling study of a group of family relationships. The characters are well-developed, and the book offers adolescents an insight into the complex psychological workings of a dysfunctional family.</p> <p>Jenny Valentine is an author to watch.</p> <p>F. Todd Goodson Manhattan, KS</p>

<p><i>Moribito: Guardian of the Spirit</i> translated by Cathy Hirano</p> <p>Arthur A. Levine Books, 2008, 248 pp. \$17.99</p> <p><i>Moribito: Guardian of the Spirit</i>, translated by Cathy Hirano, is the first of the <i>Moribito</i> series, consisting of ten books, to become available in the United States. Since their release in Japan, the books have sold millions of copies and won widespread praise. It is currently being adapted for a major television series.</p> <p>After a chance encounter with Chagum, the Second Prince of New Yogo, Balsa, a legendary female bodyguard, finds herself responsible for his life. This proves to be the greatest challenge Balsa has yet to face, as the prince's life is threatened by his own father, the Mikado, and his pack of vicious hunters. Roaming the Japanese countryside in search of safety, Balsa and Chagum gather bits and pieces of disturbing history and legend as they come to learn more about the demon within the prince and the Mikado's sinister plan to destroy it.</p> <p>Full of stylish action, <i>Moribito</i> will quickly entrance fans of manga and Japanese martial arts. The violence is mild, and Uehashi delivers her tale in a vocabulary appropriate for younger and older readers alike.</p> <p>Jordin Brown Rogers, AR</p>	<p><i>Slam</i> by Nick Hornby</p> <p>G. P. Putnam's Sons, 2007, 309 pp., \$19.99</p> <p>Fifteen-year-old Sam lives in London, skates at the Bowl (that's skateboarding to you and me), and talks to a poster of Tony Hawk everyday. His mum finally gets rid of a stale boyfriend, his teachers think he should pursue art in college, and skating with his chums Rabbit and Rubbish is never better. Then he meets Alicia, a gorgeous daughter of one of his mum's friends who is way out of his league.</p> <p><i>Slam</i> explores what it means to grow up without all the answers readily available to you. With its introspective narrative pacing, quirky characters, elements of magic realism, and heavy dose of wit and humor, this novel is a wonderful option for reluctant teenage male readers—girls will like Alicia's character as well. In a long line of "problem" novels, <i>Slam</i> delivers glimmers of hope in a sometimes dramatic and complicated world.</p> <p>Jacob Stratman Siloam Springs, AR</p>
<p><i>Smiles to Go</i> by Jerry Spinelli</p> <p>HarperCollins, 2008, 250 pp., \$16.99</p> <p>Ninth-grader Will Tuppence loves science, skateboarding, stargazing, and chess. He is obsessed with proton decay, the afterlife, and other mysteries of the universe—and frustrated with his mischief-making younger sister, Tabby. Will is caught up in a love triangle with his two best friends Mi-Su and BT and much of the story revolves around Will's feelings of unrequited love for Mi-Su. A parallel love story plays out between five-year-old Korbet Finn, a next-door neighbor madly in love with Tabby. Tabby rejects Korbet, but Korbet remains persistent. The plot turns on a tragic event that forces Will to ponder solipsism—the belief that the self is the only reality.</p> <p>Spinelli hits another home run with sidesplitting humor, spot-on characterization, and exceptional voice. Philosophical and scientific questions abound: What happens to matter if protons die? Will everything disappear? What about infinity? Does stuff become nonstuff? Is heaven a dimension? Superb choice for the science and mathematics classrooms.</p> <p>Pam B. Cole Kennesaw, GA</p>	<p><i>Snow Falling in Spring: Coming of Age in China during the Cultural Revolution</i> by Moying Li</p> <p>Melanie Kroupa Books, 2008, 176 pp., \$16.00</p> <p>ISBN: 978-0-374-39922-1</p> <p>Coming of age in 20th Century China, Moying Li's memoir illuminates the power of the human spirit to rise above adversity. Through her own childhood memories, Li recounts her family's survival through China's "Great Leap Forward," the Red Guard, and, ultimately, the Chinese Cultural Revolution. Li's character is molded by her grandmother's unconditional love and her father's profound faith in the power of education. It is through their teachings that Li navigates the turbulent waters of change.</p> <p>Li's unpretentious prose gently reveals the unreasonable demands placed upon the Chinese people across multiple generations. In a moving account of how her people not only survived, but rose above treacherous adversity, Li renews the reader's faith in the powers of both love and knowledge. A poignant literary account of cultural evolution.</p> <p>Patricia E. Ackerman Abilene, KS</p>

<p><i>Stealing Heaven</i> by Elizabeth Scott Harper Teen, 2008, 320 pp., \$16.99</p> <p>Fiction/Crime ISBN: 978-0-06-112280-4</p> <p>Stealing is all Danielle knows. She and her mother have been breaking into houses for as long as she can remember. Moving from town to town, finding just the right house to rob, and fencing their “finds,” Danielle knows no other way of life. Her mother yearns for silver, but Danielle longs for something just a little more “normal.”</p> <p>It’s only after she and her mother land in a small beach town called Heaven that Danielle actually makes a friend for the first time in her life. Also, she meets a guy who is interested in her and seems nice, but who also happens to be a cop. Heaven, a place where the beach homes are as majestic as the name of the town, seems to be a place where Danielle could actually settle down and have a real life, which is something she’s always dreamed of having. Will she throw that all away and continue the life she’s always known?</p> <p>Jennifer Lee Louisville, KY</p>	<p><i>Steel Trap: The Challenge</i> by Ridley Pearson Disney Editions, 2008, 324 pp., \$16.99</p> <p>Mystery/Thriller ISBN: 978-1-4231-0640-1</p> <p>In his latest publication, <i>Steel Trap: The Challenge</i>, Ridley Pearson introduces a unique character named Steven “Steel” Trapp. Steel is an inquisitive young man who is blessed and plagued with a remarkable photographic memory. Motivated by his father’s love for science, Steel invents a device he calls FIDOE—the Fully Integrated Digital Oder Evaluator—and, his new invention places him as a finalist in the National Science Challenge. While on his way to compete in the science challenge, Steel quickly finds himself in the middle of a dreadful plot after he attempts to return a missing briefcase to its rightful owner. With his new friend Kaleigh, Steel attempts to put the pieces of this thrilling mystery together while trying to stay one step ahead of the federal agents.</p> <p><i>Steel Trap: The Challenge</i> will appeal to readers across the board. The author’s direct approach to mystery writing and the overarching themes of teamwork and problem solving make it a great option for both advanced and struggling readers.</p> <p>Matthew G. Skillen Manhattan, KS</p>
<p><i>Waiting for Normal</i> by Leslie Connor HarperCollins, 2008, 290 pp., \$17.89</p> <p>Family/Growing up ISBN: 978-0-06-089088-9</p> <p>Twelve-year-old Addie is used to taking care of herself. Her mother is unstable, unreliable, and mostly absent, and she has been separated from her stepfather and little sisters. As Addie adjusts to a new life in a small trailer under a bridge in Schenectady, New York, she realizes that the thing she really wants is to just be normal.</p> <p>In this novel, we meet a heroine in a young girl whose future seems anything but bright. Connor introduces us to Addie, a ray of sunshine in the dismal world around her. Addie’s optimism, sensitivity, and honesty bring joy to the people she meets. As you read this sincere though heart-wrenching novel, you will feel yourself wishing, more than anything, a “normal” life for Addie.</p> <p>Sarah de Verges Fayetteville, AR</p>	<p><i>Publishers who wish to submit a book for possible review should send a copy of the book to:</i></p> <p><i>Lori Goodson</i> <i>409 Cherry Circle</i> <i>Manhattan, KS 66503</i></p> <p><i>To submit a review for possible publication or to become a reviewer, contact Lori Goodson at lagoodson@cox.net</i></p>